

Tomorrow Never Knows

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²⁰ But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;

²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

²² And have mercy on those who doubt;

²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

(Jude 17-23)

In the early 1980s, Phil Collins did an interesting cover of the Beatle's "Tomorrow Never Knows." Listen to some of the lyrics: "Turn off your mind, relax and float down stream, it is not dying. Lay down all thought, surrender to the void, it is shining. That you may see the meaning of within, it is being. That love is all and love is everyone, it is knowing."

The very same year that the Beatles wrote this song (1966), Timothy Leary came up with that “snappy” phrase to promote the benefits of LSD. He said, “Like every great religion of the past we seek to find the divinity within and to express this revelation in a life of glorification and the worship of God. These ancient goals we define in the metaphor of the present – turn on, tune in, drop out.” Since *tomorrow never knows*, we should *turn on, tune in, and drop out*. That perfectly explains what the world tells us about God, the future, and our moral duty in the world.

On the other hand you have Jude saying, “But you must *remember*, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up in the most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have

mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 17-23). I don’t think it is possible to have two worldviews any farther apart. Jude tells you here the truth about God, the future, and your moral duty in the world. Though tomorrow does not know anything, God knows tomorrow, and he warns you about it in a way that is relevant today. The solution to life is **not to turn off** your mind or **drop out**, but *remember*. “Remember” is the first verb in this section of Jude’s letter.

What are you supposed to remember? The first thing you are to remember is the “**predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Jude 17). This phrase presents the third in a series of arguments that are given to motivate you to persevere in the midst of great spiritual darkness within the church. *Remember*, Jude has given you **OT arguments** about Cain, fallen angels and the flood, Sodom, Balaam, and Korah. Each of these teaches from history that God is an avenging judge who will not

tolerate evil, especially evil that is done in his own name by people who claim to speak for him.

Jude also gave arguments from [extra-biblical sources](#), including the book of *Enoch* and the *Ascension of Moses*. Even the Jews understood that God is a judge who destroyed the earth with a flood. They knew perfectly well—even from their history that is not recorded by in the OT—about not leaving proper spheres of authority, not indulging in sensual lusts, and not walking around as complainers and scoffers of the truth.

Now Jude adds his final and most authoritative word to the NT churches. God has given [Apostles](#), messengers who came in his name to deliver the final word of Christ on these matters. Though Jude may be considered an apostle with a lower case “a,” he has in mind the 12 Apostles and Paul, the very founders of the NT church.

It is important that you understand [the authority which these men *alone* had](#), which no man alive today is given. These Apostles were eye-witnesses of Jesus’

resurrection.¹ They were chosen and called personally by Christ himself.

If the church is a building, Eph 2:20 says that the apostles and prophets are its foundation and Christ is its chief cornerstone. The rest of us are living stones, being built up into a holy temple (1 Pet 2:5). 1 Cor 3:11 says “No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” When speaking to the churches (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 3:6 etc.) and the next generation of pastors (1 Tim 6:20), Paul tells them to guard the deposit and hold firm to the traditions that were given to them by the Apostles. Therefore, our task today is not to create new theology or adopt culturally relevant methods of worship, for we are not Apostles. We have not seen the risen Christ nor been told by him that he desires changes in faith and practice. We are to obey the Scriptures, follow what they teach, and not be deceived by clever people who come into our midst and tell us not

¹ I would assume that Jude and James (Gal 1:19) saw the risen Christ, which is how they converted. But Jude does not equate himself with the 12 here.

to worry about those antiquated beliefs and ideas because they don't work with contemporary people.

Doug Groothuis wrote a very relevant blog the other day that I found after I had written this sermon. “We fallible creatures need knowable and objective truth that is authoritatively delivered from longstanding institutions based on perennially binding sources (the Scriptures). We do not need to reinvent; we need to *remember* and repent. We do not need style; we need sacrament. We do not need more experiments with the ego; we need proper worship. We do not need (another) make over; we need to be born again. We do not need a new business model; we need an ancient gospel: Christ crucified for us; Christ risen for us; Christ coming again for his own. We [do not?] need another new experience; we need faith in the truth of the gospel.”²

This is serious, serious business my friends. Because we live in a day when almost nothing is as it once was in the church. I'm not getting nostalgic about the days of

² Groothuis Blog, 12-1-8.

my youth because I think that somehow older must be better. Solomon said, “Do not say ‘Why were the old days better than these,’ for it is not wise to ask such questions” (Ecc 7:10). This has nothing to do with personal preference for things that I like or don’t like. It has to do with not abandoning our positions of authority, and thinking ourselves wiser than God. It has to do with acting out our marching orders, regardless of whether we think God is using the best strategy. Jude’s marching orders are found in vs. 20-23, and I will get to them in due time.

But first, I want to explain the exact “predictions” that the Apostles made, and tell you why they are actually relevant to Jude’s audience and to you as well. If you will notice, Jude says, “They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions’” (vs. 18). There is great confusion running around today over just what the “last times” are. Since most Evangelicals are reading *Left Behind* and similar books, rapture fever has taken hold of a good deal of the

church. Everyone thinks that ours must be the very last days of planet earth. But whether or not Christ is going to return in my lifetime, that is not what the Scripture means when it uses the language “last days.” Here is the problem.

When you attach the “last days” only to a future Great Tribulation (one that Christians won’t have to live through in the first place), you effectively make all warnings in the Bible irrelevant. **Tim LaHaye** is an example of someone who thinks that “last days” means “return of Christ.” He writes, “**The apostles and the church of the first three centuries whole-heartedly expected that Christ would return for His church during their lifetime**” (*The Rapture*, p. 28, 73).

This was apparently the theology of the Thessalonians too. Paul has to remind them, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying

that the day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thess 2:1-2). What is happening here is that people are confusing “the last days” with the “last Day.”

The Last Day is also called Judgment Day, the Great Day of the Lord, the Day of his return, etc. It is always viewed as a day, not a series of days. It is a day that will come without warning, like the flood came upon the people in Noah’s time. They had been warned by Noah and apparently as far back as Enoch about the coming disaster. But as Jesus said, “they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away” (Matt 24:39).

This day will not surprise Christians, but this is not because we can open up the newspaper and understand that the end times clock started ticking with such an such an event in the middle east or because so and so got elected president and he must be the Antichrist. Rather, that Day will not surprise us, because Jesus has told us that he is coming back and he has given us everything in the word that we need to be prepared for his return,

whenever it may happen to be. People love to quote **1 Thess 5:2** which says that **the day will come like a thief in the night**. But they forget to keep reading, where two verses later it says **“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.”** As it says in Revelation, **“Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed,”** when Jesus returns like a thief (**Rev 16:15**).

This is why Jude tells us how to act as Christians, and what to look out for from people who fake their Christian faith. Our righteous acts are the garments that we put on, so as not to be naked when Christ returns. Jude even uses the metaphor of a garment in **vs. 23**. We are to keep ourselves clothed in pure linens all throughout that period that the Scripture calls the “Last days,” or as Jude refers to it, “the last time.”

When are the last times? This may be the most helpful question you can answer when trying to figure out a biblical view of eschatology. Of course, I might first ask, “What is eschatology?” Eschatology is not the study

of the future, as so many people think. It is the study of last days (*eschaton* is the Greek word for “last” not “future”).

The Bible often talks about the **first and the last**. Jesus is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (**Rev 1:17**). There was a first Adam and a last Adam (**1 Cor 15:45**). Some who are first will be last, and some who are last will be first (**Luke 13:30**). So also, there are **first days** and there are **last days**, and as far as it concerns eschatology, these are the only two kinds of days that the Bible knows.

Hebrews 1:1-2 is a good example. It talks about a time “**long ago**” when God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in *these* “**last days**” he has spoken to us by his Son. The first days were anticipatory days, prophetic days, typological days, days that looked forward to the Seed that would crush the head of the serpent (**Gen 3:15**). The entire history of the OT encompasses those first days. You may look at original creation in Genesis 1 as the beginning of those days.

But the NT tells us of a new creation, and therefore of new days, or as we have been calling them, “last days.” These are the days of last Adam. They are the days of Christ’s kingdom. They are the days of the new creation that you and all other Christians become at conversion. You may look at John 1 as the beginning of this new creation, since **John 1** is an inspired commentary and explanation of those things which occurred in **Genesis 1**. The word which was in the beginning has become flesh. The light of the world has pierced the darkness. And in a period of seven days, he began calling his disciples to himself. At the end of that calling, they gathered together for a day of resting and rejoicing in a wedding feast which anticipates the Wedding Supper still to come. The new creation week begins just like the first.

Here is the part that people often don’t understand. **The first days have not ended with the arrival of Christ.** For, Christ has not yet put every enemy under his feet! Though his kingdom has come, the old has not yet fully passed away. Though you are a new creation in Christ,

you have not yet been glorified, sin has not yet been eradicated, death has not been cast into the lake of fire, Satan still prowls around like a roaring lion. Thus, there is at present an overlap of the first days and the last days.

To explain this in terms that are a bit different, the Scripture uses the phrases “present (evil) age” (Matt 12:32; Gal 1:4; 1 Tim 6:17; Tit 2:12) and “age to come” (Matt 12:32; Eph 1:21; Heb 6:5). Note again, *there are only two ages*. It uses the terms “flesh” and “spirit” (Rom 8:4-13), not to talk separate the physical from the spiritual like a Greek or Gnostic would do, but to separate that which is of this world, that which is natural, that which is fallen, carnal, and profane from that which is born again of the Holy Spirit of God. It uses the term kingdom to describe it. There are **kingdoms of men** throughout the Bible. But there is the **kingdom of heaven**, the kingdom of God, which Jesus says has come. The former kingdoms you can observe, see, and visit. But the later does not come with observation. People will not say “Here it is” or

“there” for the kingdom of God is within you ([Luke 17:20-21](#)).

The present evil age is, *obviously*, still here; but so is the age to come, which we are able to taste now ([Heb 6:5](#)). The flesh still seeks that which is contrary to the spirit; but the Spirit has been sent. Men and women still run about in their own little kingdoms, but the kingdom of God is upon you. So also, the first days have not yet come to an end, but the last days have begun.

Scripture describes your relationship to this fleshly age like one living in a tent ([2 Cor 5:1-4](#); [Heb 11:9](#)) in a foreign land ([Heb 11:9](#)). Those of you who go camping or hunting in the mountains know that your tent is a temporary dwelling. It gives you relief and rest, but the longing of your heart is not to sleep forever under that all too flimsy canvass. Neither was is the longing of saints of old. Abraham wandered around in a tent. Moses and his generation wandered around in a desert. Even God would not reside in a permanent place, but in a tent. He even commanded a [feast of booths \(tents\)](#) in order to

teach the people throughout the generations that though he had given them a Promised Land, they were to look forward to a city with foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Everything, even the land and the kingdom of Israel in the first times, was anticipatory of something greater, and that something is now in your possession, if you are in Christ!

And so Scripture describes your relationship to the spiritual ages as those who have come to a permanent home. Like the permanent temple that God had built in Jerusalem, you have come to a much greater temple, to Christ and his church in these last days which will continue on into eternity.

But if there is an overlap in days, when do the first days end? At the return of Christ. Since the first days still continue, Jude is as relevant to you as he was to his original hearers. For, you live in the same days as they did. And so Jude warns you about scoffers who follow their own ungodly passions. They are worldly people, devoid of the Spirit (vs. 18-19). Do you hear the language of the

Spirit, of the age to come, of God's kingdom? These scoffers are people who come into our churches that are not in fact converted. They teach and say all manner of things that take discernment, especially when they have a form of godliness but deny its power!

Because you cannot observe the coming of the kingdom in its inaugurative phase, you must listen to the warnings of Scripture in order to discern **if** what is going on in the church actually belongs in the kingdom of God. You must set your mind on things that are above and not on things that are below as so many are doing in our day. That is why Jude and Peter and the NT letters and the Gospels and the prophets and the Psalms and the Law were given to you.

Jude's warning is a summary of all the Apostolic teaching on the last days. People love to quote the following passages because Christians always like to think that they are the terminal generation. But these warnings applied in the early church, in the middle ages, during the Reformation, the awakenings, and today. And

they will apply to anyone who lives in the world of men until Christ returns!

Listen to some of the more relevant passages from the NT. Paul warns in [Acts 20:29](#), “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” If you know what a pack of wolves is capable of doing to those lambs that they isolate, then you know the clear and present danger that always exists in the church.

In [1 Tim 4:1-3](#) it says, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons [sounds very much like something Jude has been concerned with throughout his letter!], through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” Legalism is the opposite demonic teaching to the antinomianism that Jude is concerned with, but it is equally (perhaps in some

ways even more) dangerous, because legalism looks to so many people like it is something God would approve of. Yet, it has no ability to control the flesh.

In **2 Tim 3** we read, “But understand this, that in *the last days* there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. . . Among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses,³ so

³ Paul’s reference to Jannes and Jambres is fascinating to me in light of Jude. Jude has been referencing the Pseudepigrapha time and again in his discussion. Now, in a parallel passage to Jude 18, Paul references Jewish tradition (the book of Jannes of Jambres?) as well. It is almost as if they are trying to use the traditions as a means to bring further condemnation. For, the Jews knew very well the details of the stories that were left out of the Scripture (like the names Jannes and Jambres which we are told were the names of the Egyptian magicians in Pharaoh’s court that turned their

these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. . . the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (1-10, 13, 4:3-4).

We have seen a lot of this already in Jude. But he focuses on one last terrible sin that is worth mentioning. These are people “who cause divisions” in the body of Christ. Now, most people think it refers to people that stand up for doctrine in the church. “Doctrine divides” is the cry, therefore we ought to have as little of it taught and believed as possible. But this is not what Jude is talking about at all.

Remember, his first guideline to the churches was to “contend for the Faith once for all entrusted to the Saints” (Jude 3). Immediately after this warning about

staffs into snakes). Nevertheless, they would not listen to the Scripture, or even their own traditions as it concerned the warnings inherent in their own stories.

division, he picks that theme up again, “Beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy Faith.” “Your faith” is distinguished from “their faith,” the faith being taught by the heretics.⁴ It is the one, holy, apostolic faith as the Creed refers to it.

Instead of getting mad at Christians for teaching the truth, what Jude is concerned about is when people stop believing and acting upon the Faith that was deposited, and begin turning to other beliefs and practices that are not taught in Scripture. Sometimes, we Christians disagree on things that are taught in Scripture. When you are in a church that believes something different than you on one of those things, and you are willingly going to that church, submitting to its leadership, then you are not to begin causing division in that local assembly because of your disagreement. You are to respect and submit to your authorities, knowing that God will judge them twice as severely.

⁴ Bauckham, 113.

Sometimes, people come into assemblies with their own hobby horses, things that aren't even mentioned in Scripture, and when people don't believe them, they begin **whispering** to others about how they should leave that church. These are the malcontents, the grumblers that Jude has directly addressed. Nothing is ever right for these people. No one can ever do enough to please them. The whispering is a way to grab power. And like Korah, this kind of malcontented spirit will only lead to your destruction. It is a terrible sin that you must watch out for, because like a seed, it starts small, but in the end it becomes a tree of death.

You are not to come into a church with the purpose to tear asunder the community, to get everyone to follow you, but are instead to do all within your power to **build it up**. **How then is this done?** First, **by building each other up in your most holy faith (vs. 20)**. Rather than not talk about doctrine and ethics in church because it divides, you are to be about the business of learning and putting into practice that which you learn. **And what are**

you to learn? That which has been deposited to you in the Holy Scriptures.

That would include, even the very things we are discussing this hour together, the difficult things like warnings to the churches. Right this moment we are obeying Jude! But then we are to have confidence that when the church is the church, when it believes and practices those things which Christ has taught us about theology, worship, life in the body, etc. then the body is built up into all unity. Paul puts it this way, “Until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:13-14). You may not have thought about it like this, but when the church does not teach the faith, it actually promotes perpetual adolescence in the body. I fear that there is far too much juvenile delinquency going on today, and very little

maturity, starting in our pulpits. We must remember to build ourselves up in the faith, rather than in our own fleshy selfish desires.

To do this we must also **pray in the Holy Spirit**. Prayer is the way we commune with God, while he talks back to us in the word. It is also the way that he conforms us into the image of his Son. Prayer is a recognition and humility that we depend utterly upon God for our sanctification in the faith. There is an element here of **corporate prayer**, since all of these commands are corporate in nature. The church should be pleading with God to help her be built up in the faith.

Then we have the responsibility **to keep ourselves in the love of God (vs. 21)**. This is the flip side of **vs. 1** which says that God keeps us for Christ. **But how is this done?** Not by “**letting go and letting God**,” (I’ve never understood what that means), but by waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. When suffering, trials, and tribulations come (especially

in the church), we are to wait for God's mercy. Patience is the first fruit of the Spirit!

As we wait for the mercy of Jesus, we also **show mercy to those who doubt** (**vs. 22**). Not everyone has a strong faith. Many have a very weak and fragile faith. Jesus will not break a bruised reed. He will not quench a faintly burning wick (**Isa 42:3**), so also you must show patience to those who doubt.

But some you will need to **snatch out of the fire** (**Jude 23**). They are flying far too close to the flames of hell, especially as they give ear to those who are trying to tickle them with cunning words of sorcery. You must warn them sternly, with the law, so that they will lose the confidence that they keep in themselves. Others, you will have to **show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh**.

The meaning of this is difficult to ascertain. It is most likely that Jude wants the people to **pray even for the heretics**, to be sober minded about where they are headed at the present time, and to grieve in the Spirit over it, like

Jesus did over Jerusalem. Show them mercy with fear, perhaps as Paul showed mercy to the man in 1 Cor 5 whom he cast out of the congregation and handed over to Satan, so that his soul might be saved on the day of judgment (1 Cor 5:5).

All of this is proof that we are not to turn on, tune, in, and drop out. But we are to be obedient, because God controls our futures. But now I want to conclude with a question. How can you do that which Jude tells you to do? How is any of this possible? Perhaps the last little phrase here gets at the answer. We are to hate even the garment stained by the flesh. Two things come to my mind here. First, this is probably another reference to Zechariah 3, this time where Joshua the priest is clothed in filthy garments. The Angel of the LORD will not tolerate this situation, because he cannot stand in the presence of sin. So what does he do?

He tells those standing around, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And what does this mean? “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will

clothe you with pure vestments” (Zech 3:4). This gets at the heart of our problem and its solution. We are sinful, filthy people and we need new righteousness.

And that is what all in Christ now have. Galatians 3:27 says, “As many as were baptized in Christ have been clothed with Christ.” The righteousness of the Christian is not their own righteousness, but an alien righteousness. It originates in another, but it credited to you as a free gift. He is Christ our righteousness, and because of it you are holy. Will you believe that today?

The last thing this little phrase tells me is that the flesh (which I have already talked about), is passing away. As I said, the first things terminate in the second coming. But the last things began in the first coming. They will never terminate, but will continue on from glory to glory. At the completion of the present evil age, God will destroy all things. Then all that is redeemable will be remade as a new creation and the kingdom of God will be seen by all. Because the last days are here today, the inauguration of the age of the Spirit has begun.

The kingdom of God has come, and even now you taste of the powers of that age to come. How so? Because your head, who is Christ, is seated in heaven at the right hand of God. And he has also seated you in heavenly places even now. Though you wander on this earth, through justification you have entered into the eternal Promised Land of heaven. God has given you the Spirit as a deposit of the promises yet to be consummated. And he has done this so that you may obey God, as the Angel of the LORD commanded Joshua to do after clothing him in new garments. **So do not think that which is before you is an impossible task.** But look to Christ always as the one for whom, to whom, and through whom all things are given, to the glory of God. Let us *remember*, as Jude says. And let it begin now, with the Supper were Christ taught us, “Do this in remembrance of me.”